

W r e s t l i n g P e r s p e c t i v e

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Watts Goin' On?

By - Michael McGowen

Bill Watts, the anointed messiah of wrestling for many hardcores has been handed virtual carte blanche control of WCW. Since his hiring on May 12, Watts has been hammering and reshaping the promotion into his concept of pro wrestling. Many long overdue changes have been introduced, such as a focused direction and a singular identity. Yet Watts has become the target of increasingly stinging criticism and condemnation from the very people who called for his appointment: us!

Rejoicing at his hiring, much of the hardcore community believed that pro wrestling would at last be saved from the macabre cartoon of Vince McMahon. Then came the issue of Watts' Ten Commandments, especially the controversial top rope maneuver ban, and the celebrations abruptly stopped. Suddenly the Cowboy wasn't as popular as before. Former supporters began to question and attack him, accusing Watts of having lost touch with modern wrestling and dooming WCW from the start.

Charges continued to flow hot and fast like fresh lava from a volcano. It has been said Watts is trapped in a time warp, too much a disciplinarian, inconsiderate of the wrestlers' physical welfare, or about to misuse and destroy the New Japan connection. All this coming just as Watts is escaping the outlines built by the previous regimes and creating his own. Despite all warnings to the contrary, it seems many expected a turnaround to magically occur overnight and evolve how each thought best.

Considering the shape and direction WCW has been mired in, no one should expect miracles in a short time span. While Watts said he would listen to and consider fans' opinions and suggestions, never did he promise to use any of them. I find that our ideas being given any consideration is miracle enough, especially given the general attitude many in the business have towards the hardcore community. But how long do you think Watts will continue to swallow the biting criticism coming his way without a negative reaction? Can't you hear certain aides and assistants whispering in his ear, "We told you so!"

Perhaps the reason for Watts' decisions will become clearer when the finished outline of his concept comes to light. But since that time may not come for another six to 18 months, shouldn't we allow him the benefit of our doubts and give constructive suggestions instead of critical attacks? Watts has shown a willingness to be flexible, his reconsideration of the top rope ban comes to mind. He also admitted learning much from his recent trip to Japan, mentioning that any New Japan stars coming to WCW would be better promoted. Watts also mentioned he was impressed with their training and presentation methods. This may be an indication that the relationship with New Japan will not only continue, but could become stronger than ever.

Watts is implementing his concept his way, with no apologies to anyone. That concept is rooted in what he learned from those who taught him the business. No one should be surprised he is drawing from those roots, because Watts gave every indication of doing so in his Pro Wrestling Torch interviews. He is doing what he feels must be done in order to make WCW competitive and successful, regardless of conventional wisdom from anyone. Whatever Watts does, from organizing the overall direction of the promotion to dealing with those under him, is based on that philosophy.

To his credit, Watts has aimed WCW in the general direction the hardcore community had long called for by emphasizing athleticism, ring action, credibility, believability and a serious attitude. The promotion is gradually being rid of the trappings of modern wrestling, typified by the WWF-like gimmicks imposed by previous regimes, while getting back to the basics of good, tough athletes fighting and wrestling for titles and who is the better man. Dave Meltzer stated in the July 27 *Wrestling Observer*, "...that there has never been more of a product difference between WCW and (the) WWF." No longer is WCW merely a poor reflection of the WWF, but is instead a promotion finally shining with its own light. If this is the result of Watts being guilty of all the criticism leveled in his direction, then I'm for more of the same. Besides, who is our alternative? Jim Herd?

Sidelines

Thanks To Dave Meltzer, Wade Keller and Jeff Cohen for the plugs. We appreciate their support.

Fantasy Federation is published bimonthly by Jeff Cohen and features dream matches between wrestling's top stars. Jeff, who writes most of the matches, provides color commentary on each match. Also, each issue features and insightful essay about the business. Fantasy Federation, which is highly recommended, is available for \$1.00 an issue from Jeff Cohen at 50 Shelley Lane, Great Neck, NY 11023.

Billy Graham, Stan Lane, Ivan Koloff, Rockin' Robin, Tommy Young, Jim Duggan, Larry Sharpe, Special Delivery Jones and Angelo Poffo - what do they have in common? They are all part of *Wrestling Perspective: The Interviews*, a 60 page book chronicling the interviews that have appeared in *Wrestling Perspective* over past two and a half years. This is a fantastic collection of insight, humor and intrigue that you are bound to read from cover to cover to cover to cover and over again. *Wrestling Perspective: The Interviews* is available for \$10 for subscribers and \$12 for non-subscribers. Quantities of this collection are limited, so send in your order today. Please note this collection does not contain the Tim Horner interview that appears in this issue.

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Back Issue Sale • We're clearing out our inventory of back issues to give you the perfect opportunity to fill in those missing holes in your *Wrestling Perspective* collection. All back issues are available for \$1.00 for a single issue and \$.75 per issue when you order for two or more. It's a bargain you can't pass up. Here is a list of what we have left, supplies of some issues are limited, so please list alternates in case selections are out sold out.

Volume I, Issue 2: NWA booking ideas, WWF/Japan relationship and how PPV works.

Volume I, Issue 3: The next NWA champion, Midnight Express, women and wrestling, and racism and wrestling.

Volume I, Issue 4: House show angles, Cruise and Funk, NWA in the northeast, Family Feud and Capital Combat.

Volume I, Issue 5: Doing the job, Tommy Young tribute, Portland wrestling and baseball season.

Volume I, Issue 6: Eddie Gilbert's future, racism and wrestling and the Ultimate Warrior.

Volume II, Issue 3: Sid Vicious' contract, suspension of reality, Hennig as WCW champion, Tommy Young interview and the Phantom of the Ring's debut column.

Volume II, Issue 4: Dusty Rhodes as a booker, George Hackenschmidt, non-fan's perception of wrestling and Ric Flair.

Volume II, Issue 5: Global, hardcore fans, Herd and Rhodes, and screw job finishes.

Volume II, Issue 6: Wrestling Fans, Lex Luger, steroids and Angelo Poffo interview.

Volume II, Issue 7: Sid Justice in the WWF and Stan Lane interview part I.

Volume II, Issue 8: Apter publications, Stan Lane interview part II and Flair as WWF champion.

Volume II, Issue 9: Flair vs. Hogan, Rockin' Robin interview and the 10 best tag teams of all time.

Volume III, Issue 23: Year end awards.

Volume III, Issue 24: Joel Goodhart, tape delay and steroids.

Volume III, Issue 25: Eddie Gilbert, Ivan Koloff interview part I (last issue old format).

Volume III, Issue 26: Watts and Rhodes, Koloff interview part II, and Martin Karadagian (first issue new format).

Volume III, Issue 27: Ron Simmons as WCW champion, Smoky Mountain, Flair, and Buddy Rogers tribute.

In Perspective: Tim Horner

A little bit of White Lightning has helped Smoky Mountain Wrestling become the hottest new promotion to appear in quite some time. In this interview with David Skolnick on Aug. 29, 1992, Tim Horner, one of Smoky Mountain's principles and current top contender for the SMW title, discusses the upstart promotion. Horner also discusses how he started in wrestling, his 13-year career and his and the promotion's future.

Wrestling Perspective: How did you first break into the business?

Tim Horner: I guess the way I got into the business, I was 17 and we had matches in my hometown, Morristown, Tennessee. I kind of blacked out and ended up trying to get in the ring when I was 17 against the Mongolian Stomper and I think Robert Fuller. Thank God the cops got me before they did. The promoter told me when I got to be 18 and if I could get up to 200 pounds, they'd give me a tryout. I waited a year.

WP: What were you thinking at the time you jumped in?

TH: The heat of the moment I guess because I don't actually remember going to the ring. But I actually woke up there.

WP: When it happened, did somebody grab you?

TH: No, they were going for me, but luckily the police got me and pulled me out to the floor before any serious damage was done. Knowing what I know now, I could have seriously been hurt.

WP: I guess you turned 18 and were up to 200 pounds.

TH: Almost. I was almost 185, 190. I hit the weights hard. A guy by the name of Louis Tillet was booking for the old Southeastern territory, which was based out of Knoxville, Tennessee, and he gave me a tryout and I went to camp for six months and I've been doing it ever since. It will be 13 years this November.

WP: Who actually trained you?

TH: Actually when I first started, it was a guy named Rick Connors. When Jerry Brisco and Jack came into the area, they kind of took me under their wing and took me back to Florida.

WP: A couple of great teachers.

TH: Yeah. Real good guys, good friends of mine.

WP: So you toiled around the regionals for a while.

TH: Yeah, toiled around there for a while, in and out of Charlotte, went to work for Bill Watts in Louisiana which, like Bill or not, I learned more about wrestling there than anywhere. I think if you talk to any of the guys that have been around a while, they'll probably tell you the same thing. I was down there for about 13 months my first time and went back a different time for about eight months. I kind of traveled around and I got a big break in '84 when I was fortunate enough to catch a pinfall on Hawk. That was probably a big highlight of my career. Unfortunately, Vince McMahon took it over about three months later and the push just went to the bottom. But I've had some good experiences with Brad Armstrong. We were UWF tag team champions and National tag team champions. Had it not been for the Turner situation, we might still be together. It didn't work out so we had to go our separate ways.

WP: You felt you were being underutilized?

TH: Very much so. Not only us, but the fans. We got cards and letters all the time. Fans and people pretty much expressing themselves that we weren't given the opportunity to utilize our capabilities. I still think that. I've got a few years on me but I can move with just about anybody.

WP: It's kind of a catch-22 where they say that you're too small. But to get big, you've got to use steroids?

TH: Yeah. They say, "You're too small" and then the WWF has always catered to bigger guys and the smaller guys don't have a chance up there unless he sees something in them. But the opportunity wasn't there for me. It created a big problem. I had a lawsuit with McMahon for eight or nine months.

WP: I know you worked for him for a while.

TH: Yeah, I worked for him for almost a year. But after approaching him and asking for an opportunity and the chance to work on the level I was capable of working, he said, "No." But then he wouldn't let me go back to WCW.

WP: You were locked into a contract. You were supposed to come back under a mask.

TH: I was going to come back and do a deal. That was when Flair was still there and that didn't pan out because they held me up for eight or nine months. I couldn't work anywhere. Even some of the independents said, "Well, I don't want to use you. Maybe we'll get a shot with Vince at some time and we don't want to get any heat." So I was locked up for eight or nine months.

WP: At that time you were doing nothing?

TH: Nothing. I sat at home, worked out and trained. But I really never did anything.

WP: So after that you started working for Turner again.

TH: I went back to Turner when Ole came in and luckily Ole appreciates your talent. He's old school and he's old style. But he understands; he's along the lines of Watts. Now that Watts is back, Ole's back. We were going to come in and do that mask deal, but Ole didn't like it and he didn't push it. So that kind of dropped too.

WP: You said that working for Watts was a good experience. What's it like working for him?

TH: He teaches you to respect the business. A lot of guys getting into the business now don't respect the business. A lot of guys are walking into WCW and haven't had any training. I've got more shower time than a lot of the guys down there have ring time. For them to walk off the street and make six figures is just beyond me. When the operation saw that they couldn't produce what they were paying them, then these guys were hot because they wanted the big money. That's been a thorn in a lot of guys side who put their time in 10 or 15 years. When I first got into the business, I was told, "Put your time in. Put your time in. Do your ring time. Do your travel. Ten years from now when you really know the business, you'll get that big break." Well, when 10 years comes around, now it's 13 years, and I feel I put my time in and the opportunity is just not there. I got hurt last year. I got dropped on my head and was paralyzed from my neck down for a couple of minutes. Luckily, it wasn't real serious. Paralysis is serious, but I came back and I was out for eight months. They fired me while I was still hurt and under their doctor's care. That's another problem I'm looking into. Bottom line is now we've got the opportunity here to bring wrestling back the way it used to be and as we like to say, "The way you like it." We've gotten great response with Smoky Mountain Wrestling all over the world. People in Japan have called and they've gotten some of our tapes on the cable channels over there. In Australia, some people over there. People who can get a hold of it really like what we're doing.

WP: It's you along with Jim Cornette and Sandy Scott.

TH: Right. I sat on this for a long time. The eight months I was out and had nothing to do, I said, "Look, I'm going to have to do something with myself." I got to looking around and checking around. Then Jim became available and I called Jim and we talked and we sat around and we did this and we did that and Sandy became available. It was like a whole puzzle coming together. Here's Sandy Scott who's been an event coordinator for the Crockett organization for a long time and was previously with Turner. He knew all the ins and outs of that part of the business. Cornette, nobody will argue that he's a brilliant mind in this business and that came together. I felt that I could contribute a lot to this so we all just came together and we got a backer and here we are. We're on 10 markets now, syndicated markets, and we're bumping some WWF shows off and we're bumping some WCW shows. They're taking our show because we're more local and people like us. They understand us and we don't come in and rape the town once a year. We go back once a month. We give something back to the community. We're working with all kinds of civic organizations and clubs. We're on

a one-to-one basis. We bring ourselves down to the people's level where they don't think we have our noses in the air and it's paying off. We're really pleased and we're hopeful that we'll grow.

WP: It's basically the old Mid-Atlantic area.

TH: Not so much that. We based ourselves out of Knoxville. We saw a market there. Actually in Virginia, a lot of homes don't have access to the WWF and WCW and the pay-per-views. They just don't get it. So when we went up there, the believability of the business was there to a certain extent. We say, "95 percent know it's not or think it's not, but it's that other five percent that keeps them guessing and buying tickets and coming out." That's who we're catering to. We're not overpricing ourselves. We're going in with the top ticket being \$8; that's a ringside seat. It costs you \$8 to go to a movie.

WP: You're building houses. It's not like the WWF which doesn't build momentum for that next house.

TH: Right. They come into Knoxville maybe once a year and they bring everybody they've got in and hope to draw a house. Whereas, we go into Knoxville and we set up an angle or something that we can come back with two weeks later. That two weeks turns into something and it builds and builds and builds and finally, we're attracting a crowd. They catered to kids for so long up there and we don't actually cater to kids, we give the kids something they want to see.

WP: You have a lot of talented guys there - Orndorff, Rock 'n Roll Express.

TH: There was a lot out there. I don't want to harp on it, but WCW had people running the company who weren't qualified to run the company. They had professional people running a wrestling company who knew nothing about it. Now that Watts is back in, you're going to see a major change. The guy who walked into the office down there who was big, steroided-up and looked like somebody, they said, "Hey, let's sign this guy for \$100,000." That's the way they were operating. Once the ring entrance was done, this guy couldn't stick his thumb up his butt with both hands. That's why their houses have dropped tremendously over the last one and a half years. They were bring in this new influx of talent, but they didn't have the older ring veterans to help them and to carry them and cater to them and help them get that ring savvy. All these guys were left hanging out there. So we went in and scooped them up.

WP: It seems as though they're leaving a lot of guys hanging out to dry - Terry Taylor, Ricky Morton. There are reports that they're going to be dumping Eaton and Anderson in six months.

TH: I hope they do because we know where they're going if they do. Not to spill any beans, but we have something to offer the guys. Obviously, we can't compete moneywise with Turner because his pockets are real deep. But we can compete as far as talentwise. We don't have to go into these big coliseums. We cater to these high schools and the local people. When you get in there and deal with local people one-on-one, when you've got the mayor coming up and telling you in some of these towns that he appreciates you coming in and helping his town out. It means a lot to us. That means we can come back into that town. When you've got the mayor and the civic people, the fire departments, the police departments, everybody on your side, you can't go wrong. All you have to do is go in there and you don't have to worry. People turn out to support their community.

WP: Any chance of a working relationship with Turner?

TH: Since we started, almost everything we've done, two or three weeks later, they do it. Going out to see kids at the hospitals. We used to do it all the time. Brad and I used to go every couple of weeks somewhere. Ole was a firm believer in that and I was too. We'd go out on our own time and visited the kids. People see

that and say, "These guys aren't bad guys." We went back to that and all of a sudden, they're doing it too. But that may be because Watts is back in there. Like I said, I tutored under Watts. I never got a big break down there for Watts. I talked to him several times and he said, "I could probably never give you a top spot." At that point, he catered to big guys. It wasn't til Bill Dundee went in there with the Rock 'n Roll Express and the Midnight Express, that he accepted the fact that little guys could make him money. They did record business. They did \$1.2 million in 14 shows down there, which had never been done. Bill Watts made his comeback. It was tremendous money and he had to kind of bite the bullet there and say, "Maybe the little guys can draw me money."

WP: What do you think of what they're doing with Brad now?

TH: They gave him the light heavyweight championship. He enjoys going to Japan. He's got 10 to 12 weeks a year there.

WP: They're promoting him, but they're not letting him do what he does best.

TH: Yes. That was the same thing with us. They put us together and put us against Windham and Anderson or somebody. When we first came back from the UWF to the Crockett organization, they put us with Khrushchev and Koloff, 20 minutes on TBS and we tore the house down. They came back and in the infamous words of Magnum T.A., "It was too good." And I went, "How can it be too good?" They had the Rock 'n Rolls there and we didn't compete with Rock 'n Roll. I think we had our own style, but at that point, they were being featured and we weren't so we had to take a back seat. I don't mind, they are two great guys and I don't mind taking a back seat to them. But at some point, you've got to say, "Hey, at least give these guys a try," and they never did. Even though we went back to Atlanta, they put us together a few times and then they just kind of killed us off. I don't know if they didn't want it. I don't think they didn't think we were a good team because I think we were. I think everybody thought we were. I think we were just handy. They used us like, "well, we need somebody now, let's use these guys."

WP: They needed someone else to look good.

TH: The most embarrassing moment in my life was when they put us on the Clash against those Master Blasters in Ashville, North Carolina. Those guys couldn't lace their boots, they knew nothing and the people were saying, "Oh, you're carrying those guys." We knew we were and it was obvious that the fans could see it. Why can't these promoters see it.

WP: It was Jim Herd.

TH: Herd's a whole different story. He killed the wrestling business.

WP: Do you see it making a comeback?

TH: Yeah, but I don't see it overnight. Once you drive a nail deep, it's harder to pull it out. I think they'll turn it around eventually. Wrestling goes through a phase every four or five years. We've been on a tremendous high the last five years from Hogan selling out everywhere. Now we're at a low again. If you follow it, it's up and down. But we're hoping to get a jump on this. I think we got the jump before everyone else did. We have to re-educate the wrestling fans that it is wrestling. We're not catering to cartoons. We're advertising wrestling, but we're not giving them wrestling and that's what the fans want to see. They don't want to see the entrances. The guys up north, they come down and they do their dance and they get in the ring and when the bell rings, it's like, "okay, what do I do?" The people can see that. To have somebody that

they're going to push and put up on a pedestal, the people say, "He shouldn't be there." When they're telling you that, it looks to me like the bookers and the promoters could see that. If the fans can see it, why can't they see it.

WP: With the success of Smoky Mountain, do you see the regionals making a comeback?

TH: I see the regionals making a comeback, a strong comeback. I think, we just heard, Memphis just had good crowds. But the key to the Memphis thing was when the Rock 'n Roll Express came back in. They said that the Rock 'n Roll Express was dead. Sure it was dead. You never did anything with it. You split them up and they turn every good babyface. Taylor did tremendous business. Ricky Morton did good business. Tommy Rich, when he wanted to be, was a good babyface. We're taking them.

WP: It's harder to be a good babyface then a good heel.

TH: Anybody can go out there and strut and lie. That's the basics of being a heel. You go out there and lie. Ernie Ladd told me one time when he was booking for Bill Watts, "If you can go out there and lie. Everything you say is a lie, you'll have a tremendous ton of heat." I used to watch him. Some of his interviews were classics from the old Mid-Atlantic area. He would come out. He had a feud with Tony Atlas and it was a classic, I've got it on tape at home. His interviews were great. He came out and said, (doing a Ladd impersonation) "Ain't but room for one black man in this territory and that's me. I'll knock the black off your face and if I can't, my mama's a possum." So the next week when he came out and didn't beat him, everybody stood up and said, "Your mama's a possum." He carried that on week after week, for months they told him his mama was a possum. It's not the big things, it's not the bumps. People getting into the business today, young guys, think being able to work is to drop kick, leap frog, power slam and clothesline. If they can do that, they think they're a wrestler. It has nothing to do with being a wrestler. If you can get in there and tell a story and you can make the fans sit up and you can make the fans sit down and you can make the girls cry, you can make them yell at you or clap for you. Having control over that audience is being able to work, not drop kicks. Anybody can drop kick or leap frog. I can take you out and in five minutes and I can have a match with you. But you won't know what you're doing. Maybe you will. I can have you doing stuff you wouldn't dream of doing. I did that for a while, but it got me hurt. I gave my body to guys who didn't know what to do with it. If you give your body to a guy who weighs 300 pounds...

WP: Sid Vicious.

TH: Sid's head's as big as a pumpkin now. He screwed himself in both places. What's he going to do? Play softball? There's just not a demand for softball players.

WP: Are you going to expand into markets in the states you're already established in or look elsewhere?

TH: We're looking at a few markets. We have TV in LaGrange, Georgia, which we actually didn't want, but they wanted our show in LaGrange, just to tease Turner a bit. Athens wants the show. They don't have it. Sheffield and Florence, Alabama, has our show. Chattanooga has our show. Knoxville has our show. Bristol, Virginia, has our show. Oak Hill, West Virginia; Hickory, North Carolina. We just got cleared to go into Harrisonburg, Virginia. We just got cleared to go into Hazard, which is going to be a great market for us. We bumped WCW off.

WP: Thank you Tim for taking some time out.

TH: Thank you.

Is "The Savior" Dead?

By - Rodney Leighton

For the past several years, World Championship Wrestling, and the NWA before that, have changed bookers on a frequent basis. Without fail, approximately two weeks into the newest person's reign, some hardcore editor, columnist or letter writer would start to complain about various booking practices. This would reach a crescendo about three months into each bookers' tenure and would not diminish until that person was replaced. People would be happy with the new booker for a couple of weeks and then the cycle would start anew. Without fail, these people would conclude their pleas and demands to remove the incumbent booker with a passionate entreaty to hire Cowboy Bill Watts.

When Watts was finally hired, most, Vic Stanley being the only notable exception, went into ecstasies of varying degrees; proclaiming the revival of WCW and wrestling in general and predicting fantastic things for that promotion and wrestling fans.

Shortly into his reign, however, Watts introduced some rules and practices which were offensive to hardcore fans. I recall suggesting that Watts was aiming to operate a successful small, regional promotion and I have yet to see any reason to rescind that prognosis.

Lately, I have noticed many more complaints about Watts. All are perfectly justified. Hardcores have not yet begun demanding his head, possibly because many viewers Watts as the one and only hope for a revival or indeed the survival of WCW. No one has any prospects to put forth. Yet if Jim Cornette did not have his own promotion, would hardcores now be clamoring for the replacement of Watts with Cornette? Can one realistically and justifiably make any decision on Watts' tenure to date? After all, it's only been a couple of months. I say yes.

From the very beginning, Watts started pushing himself. Anyone whoever watched his former TV promotions could have told you it would happen. Watts is pushing his son, who, based solely on various reports, has no business in a ring. Watts has, long ago, established that he has little interest in nationally televised events. Yet he is running a company whose sole area of profitability is pay-per-view.

I had long considered that Halloween Havoc would be the deciding factor. If it was a very good or better show, then Watts knew what he was doing and we could ignore his foibles. If it was bad or worse, it was time to start campaigning for a replacement. Based upon what I have heard to this date, I doubt I'll make any arrangements to get Halloween Havoc.

That being the case, the only North American wrestling I shall be watching is Smoky Mountain. I suggest that says something... something of which people should take notice. I further suggest that, if hardcores really desire change in WCW, they write, not that Watts be removed, but that they no longer watch WCW and instead watch SMW. No argument is more compelling to a business executive than one saying consumers are going to the competition.

To conclude: no, I don't believe that "the Savior" is dead. Not yet. But he has dug his grave. He may in fact have a foot already in it. So, Mr. Watts you have to decide if you want to run WCW like a national promotion in the nineties or if you are content operating like a small, regional independent from the seventies. If you go with the former, you have to alter a number of your policies and practices, but you will be successful and have the approval and admiration of hardcore fans everywhere. If, however, you elect to follow your current trend and choose the latter, you can expect to lose fans in vast quantities and to be chastised and vilified in every hardcore newsletter and at every turn.

Which will it be?

Letters To The Editors

Regarding "Missy Hyatt: More Than Professional Wrestling's Sex Symbol?" from issue 28, I met Missy in June, 1992 when she appeared on John Arezzi's live radio broadcast. I was impressed as she responded to phone-in questions with great poise. I discovered that it takes a really smart person to play the role of an airhead.

Mark Chesner
Plainview, NY

The History Of The Stereotype: Part II

By - The Phantom Of The Ring

The end of the First World War also signaled the beginning of a new era in American society, which was reflected in its sporting life.

America awoke to find itself shocked by the Black Sox scandal of 1919 and, resultantly, baseball was in deep trouble. College football was making large new inroads. Boxing was beginning to take off. The first million dollar gate was only a few years away. Meanwhile, the sport of professional wrestling was about to take a spectacular nose dive.

Because of the baseball scandal, newspapers decided to examine other popular pastimes for honesty. Needless to say, professional wrestling was ripped to shreds. The carnal atmosphere of the game was emphasized and the integrity of the sport seriously brought into question.

The effect of this scrutiny was to foster a battlefield mentality within the game. The promotions grew tighter and no information was leaked to the press. Toots Mondt, a former policeman for Frank Gotch and Charley Cutler among others, formed a liaison with Stranger Lewis, Jack Curley and Ray Fabiani. Mondt revolutionized wrestling through the use of the telegram to standardize results around the country. Mondt

did not actually have to be there to determine the results; he could simply telegraph the winners to whatever promoter was staging the card using the trust's wrestlers.

This, in turn, led Mondt and Lewis to homogenize their product. America was in the midst of an "All-American" sports boom. Babe Ruth dominated baseball, Jack Dempsy dominated boxing, and Red Grange would come to dominate college football. The image was fresh and strictly All-American. Mondt and Lewis knew that if wrestling was to compete, their image needed to be in line with the prevailing image. So, wrestling began to become "American." College football types were pushed at the expense of older ethnic types. Wayne Munn and Gus Sonnenberg were in and Stan Zbyszko and Ivan Podubny were out (Zbyszko was tried as champion in 1921, but was a bomb at the box office). The mainstream of professional wrestling was now mainstream American.

The emphasizing of All-American types was fine and dandy for media exposure, for the absence of ethnic types automatically flashed a no corruption sign to the public at large. For the American public, the ethnic was a person to be looked at with suspicion, for the odds were that he was either an anarchist (Sacco and Vanzetti) or an underworld figure (Al Capone, Johnny Torrio, Dion O'Bannion, Hymie Weiss and Arnold Rothstein). This image was further enhanced by the knowledge that Rothstein was the person who fixed the 1919 World Series. The media also had an easier time playing up the All-American types, they were more easily accepted than the ethnics, for whom it was difficult for the media to push. Strangler Lewis gained nationwide acceptance as a fighter while Zbyszko was mocked in Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*.

Yet, there was still that market of ethnics that begged to be exploited. During the past decade, the growth of wrestling in ethnic neighborhoods was astounding. Wrestling began to be identified as an ethnic sport in cities such as New York. As the market was there, it would be foolish for a good business man not to take advantage of it. Enter Jack Pfeffer.

Pfeffer was an expatriate Russian Jew who fled his homeland during the Revolution of 1917. Trained in the ballet and working as a promoter, he found obtaining employment in his field in America next to impossible because of his ethnic background (namely he was Jewish). He went to work for Mondt in the New York wrestling office and learned the business. During his time there Pfeffer came into contact with several European wrestlers looking for work. These wrestlers were always at the bottom of the card, if there at all. Yet, Pfeffer noticed that crowds showed up to see these wrestlers and figured that there was a market for this talent. Resultantly, Pfeffer marketed these ethnic wrestlers in their own neighborhoods, holding small cards in each. A Russian neighborhood in Brooklyn would see the "Russian Champion" defend his title against a worthy challenger, and an Italian neighborhood a few blocks away would see the "Italian Champion" defend his title against another worthy challenger. Often the challengers were one and the same person.

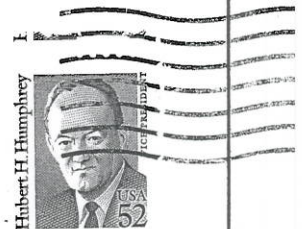
Considering all the neighborhoods in which to promote and the natural shortage of available wrestlers, it was not difficult for Pfeffer to change their identities. John Doe was a Russian on Monday, an Italian on Tuesday, a Pole on Wednesday, a Jew on Thursday, and a German on Friday. The champions were usually well-known wrestlers within the community, such as Ivan Podubny or Jimmy Londos, but sometimes they were not always what they were made to seem. Pfeffer passed off both Paul Boesch and Dave Levin as Jewish, though both were not (Levin's real name was George Wenzel and he was Lutheran).

In reality, though, Pfeffer was actually running a crude equivalent to baseball's farm system. If an ethnic wrestler showed the stuff of a champion drawing card, he would be elevated to the big time cards run by Mondt, Leis and Curley. If necessary, his name would be changed to something more "American." His bonafide "stars" were usually over-the-hill wrestlers like the Zbyszkos and Podubny (who didn't come to these shores to wrestle until the age of sixty). However, call it what you will, it was still extremely profitable and gave Pfeffer the cash to make a major challenge to the established promotion during the thirties along with another promoter who made his bones pushing Irish wrestlers in Boston: Paul Bowser.

What gave Pfeffer his impetus was the Depression. The Depression made the sports dollar even tighter and wrestling was not on anyone's must-see list. Wrestling continued to thrive in the ethnic neighborhoods because of its low ticket price and because it presented what its public wanted to see. As the glamour wore off the college football types, the ethnic wrestlers began to be accepted back into the mainstream. Jimmy Londos went over for the major version of the world's championship and two of his persistent challengers were Rudy Dusek and Dr. Harry Fields, a Bohemian and a Greek respectively. With the coming of the thirties, wrestling would change its ethnic identity and never look back.

Next Issue - How Wrestling Changed During The Depression

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